



Preliminary Study Shows Subsidized Guardianship Helps Children Reach Permanency

In the interest of helping those caring for the children of relatives and provide another option for the child to reach permanence within a lifelong family, the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare initiated the Subsidized Guardianship program in September 2005. The program recently received a positive review by an independent evaluation firm, Westat, of Rockville, Maryland.

"Of all the federal demonstrations, the Milwaukee results provide the latest and best confirmation of the benefits and cost effectiveness of supporting relatives to become permanent guardians as an alternative to retaining children in long-term foster care," said University of Illinois Professor, Mark Testa, who is the lead investigator of the evaluation. Dr. Testa is also the architect of the ten-year Illinois subsidized guardianship demonstration and leads the evaluation of a similar demonstration that Tennessee started a year ago.

Subsidized Guardianship provides stability and a lifetime family to children in cases where they cannot be reunified with their parents and adoption is not an option the family wishes to pursue. The

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Mark Testa, Lead Evaluator

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Community Gives to Kids in Care

Holly Berg, a **National American Miss Wisconsin Teen** contestant and winner of the Miss Cover Girl Teen competition thought of BMCW children in foster care when she was asked to help find a place to donate stuffed animals collected by pageant contestants. Holly, age 18, won the competition by selling 10 pages of ads for the pageant program. The toys will be provided to children when taken into BMCW custody.

The pageant provides a week of professional development and life-skills to 500 girls of different age groups.

Another effort to assist BMCW children in care came from **United Health Care employees** who held an Adopt-a-Box event. Employees donated items, such as hair and hygiene products, books, and gift cards, that were packed in shoe boxes to be given to children entering foster care. The donation of 100 boxes will be distributed to the region offices.



Miss Teen Wisconsin contestant Holly Berg delivered a box of new stuffed animals for BMCW children in care to Office Associate Bobby Jo Schroeder.

BMCW employees from across program areas came together for a **10th anniversary recognition** on June 18, 2008. Mark Liberski opened the event with a moving poem. Director Denise Revels Robinson, Secretary Reggie Bicha, and Senator Alberta Darling spoke on the origins and progress made.

Missed the event? See photos, page 4.

From the Director



On July 1, 2008, the BMCW has become part of the new Department of Children and Families. This is the first time in Wisconsin history that a department has been created to solely focus on the needs of children and families.

What does this mean to our day-to-day operation? Are there any changes?

As explained at the brown bag lunches with Secretary Reggie Bicha in the early part of the year, the new department will have a special focus on the southeast area of Wisconsin where the services provided by the various divisions and bureaus are most frequently used. Secretary Bicha and the division heads will have a Milwaukee office and will be working here for part of the week. This will help with the coordination of state services in the region as well as with the cooperation between state and local governments.

The new department will have an increased emphasis on preventing child abuse and neglect. This will be through early identification of needs and services to families undergoing the type of stress that leads to abuse/neglect. Having the W-2 (TANF), early childhood programs, and child support within the Department will assist with streamlining the access of families to the resources they need to keep children safe and well.

Helping families secure employment and seeking the active involvement of fathers in the lives of their children are clear goals.

As you would expect, the creation of the Department is a major change and a work in progress. Please continue to check the DCF intranet pages for updates and read any emails that you receive.

It was nice to see so many of the staff gather for the BMCW's 10th anniversary commemoration on June 18th. We are often so busy with the important work we do that we don't take time to look back and recognize how far we have come in improving child welfare services to Milwaukee's children and families. This was the time to do so. I would like to thank all the staff who put the event together and who took time to participate.

Denise Revels Robinson

Subsidized Guardianship

Continued from page 1.

Program provides licensed relatives the same financial assistance that they received as foster parents and would receive as adoptive parents.

"Subsidized Guardianship provides another option for reaching permanency for children placed with relatives who are licensed foster parents. We are very pleased that families are using the program and with the results of the review," stated BMCW Director Denise Revels Robinson.

To be eligible for Subsidized Guardianship, a child must have been in out-of-home care under a Child in Need of Protection and Services (CHIPS) court order for at least nine months, in a stable placement with a relative licensed as a foster parent, and have been randomly selected for the program. Since January 2006, 157 children have been eligible for the program through a random selection process and 28 of them have already left foster care through subsidized guardianship. Prior to that, 128 eligible children were "grandfathered" into the program. Children in the Kinship Care program are not eligible.

Some families may be uncomfortable with the idea of adopting another relative's child. Yet, long-term foster care is not desirable. Revels Robinson explained that long-term foster care does not give the child the legal or social permanence every child deserves to have within a forever family. Also, under foster care, a child welfare case needs to remain open, meaning the family must continue court appearances and monthly case worker visits, as well as re-licensing. Under Subsidized Guardianship, the legal status of the child moves to legal guardianship and the case is closed. Before closing, however, the child's specific needs are reviewed to ensure resources to meet them are available to the family. The services of the Foster and Adoption Family Resource Center in West Allis are available to families in the Subsidized Guardianship program once the case is closed.

The Subsidized Guardianship program provides the same financial assistance to licensed relative foster parents who become legal guardians as they received as foster parents and would receive as adoptive parents. It allows BMCW to step out of the family's life knowing the child's future is secure.

The results of the Westat evaluation will be used to advise the federal government to continue providing such subsidies under the federal Title IV-E program that provides assistance to families adopting children from state child welfare systems.

Eleven states have received waivers from the federal government to offer the Subsidized Guardianship program. In Illinois and Maryland, the waiver was extended to include relatives in the Kinship Care program.

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Training, Training, Training

Professional development is an integral part of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Safety Plan.

As the Milwaukee Child Welfare Safety Plan advances, staff have had great opportunities to enhance their practice skills through training opportunities.

One item on the Safety Plan is the updating of **Safety Service** procedures to emphasize identifying and helping parents enhance their own protective capacity. Joint training with Initial Assessment staff will emphasize this as well as refine the case transfer process and responsibilities.

Working with relative caregivers to identify those fit and willing to care for children for both the short and long-term is a priority of BMCW. Training for all staff took place May 30th and included a view from the bench delivered by the presiding judge at Children's Court, Judge Mary Triggiano. This training was followed up by training on the Subsidized Guardianship program, which offers an alternative permanency option for relative caregivers who are licensed foster parents.

Management from across program areas met with consultants Jess McDonald and Connie Flower to discuss implementing **training teams and mentors** for all program areas. The concept has worked well for Ongoing Case Management and is to be extended to Initial Assessment under the Safety Plan. Lorraine Hartmann, Cathy Dupar, Jennifer Popovich, Jacquelyn Hall, Margaret Wolski, and the UWM Child Welfare Partnership for Professional Development are working with McDonald and Flower.

Other progress on the Safety Plan is a **series of community trainings** aimed to help the public understand and buy into the mission of the BMCW and understand their own role in keeping children safe.

The first of four workshops was held in May with about 50 people attending; the second on July 9th was

fully booked with 60 attending. A special training for health professionals was held July 14th in cooperation with the Milwaukee Center for Independence. Department of Corrections and W2 staff will also be trained as part of the effort to assist in the integration of services to families.

BMCW will issue its first **Child Safety Scorecard** the end of July. The Scorecard, developed by Section Chief Martha Johnson and the program evaluation managers, utilizes eWiSACWIS data to provide stakeholders with a statistical view of child safety in the community.

The **medical liaison** position has been posted on the WisJobs web site. The position calls for a nurse practitioner who will assist Medical Director Dr. Michelle Urban. Recruitment efforts continue.

Initial Assessment staff have access to the **Emergency Services Fund** for families with immediate needs that should be addressed while the initial assessment takes place. A system for disbursement of the funds and guidelines have been developed and staff trained.

The request for proposals for the **Community Response Pilot** aimed at child abuse prevention

will go out in September. The expected launch date for is January 1, 2009.

Detailed updates on workgroup activity as well as a summary of the entire Safety Plan are available on the BMCW web site.



Community Resource

Prison Action Milwaukee is a group for family and friends of the incarcerated. It is a source of support and information for those advocating on behalf of inmates. Contact Rose Scott at 414-445-2487 for information (email realrose@sbcglobal.net).



BMCW Program Assistant Linda Ashley and Chief of Operations Darlene Kuhn, La Causa



Ongoing Supervisor Dennis Rodriguez



Access Supervisor Rita Zapen and IA Supervisor Iris Colon-Lucio



IASW Dana Gresbach, PEM Lois Buchholz, OA Jamie Wade, OCM Program Manager Kathy Blizzard.



DCF Secretary Reggie Bicha, PEM Dan Wendt, and Area Administrator Gary Groth



Region Manager Carolyn Lee and OCM Supervisor Mark Crawford

Busy at CFCP

Career Fair

On Saturday, May 3rd, from 10-1 pm, Children's Family and Community Partnerships (CFCP) held a **Career Fair** at the BMCW Region 2 office at 6111 N. Teutonia. Case managers and mentors engaged in conversations with attendees to give them an idea of what case management work is like. Potential hires then spoke with supervisors, who conducted an informal interview. Some attendees were then scheduled for a formal follow-up interview during the week. Attendees who did not progress to the interview stage with CFCP were informed of a wide array of other employment options within the Children's Hospital and Health System. The fair was a great success with 40 attendees over the three-hour period, almost half of whom were scheduled for formal interviews.

Cinco de Mayo Celebration

The Children's Family and Community Partnerships Diversity Committee observed Cinco de Mayo at their May 6th All-Staff at the Tommy Thompson Center. Vera O. Pina, a therapist contracting with La Causa, spoke to staff about the importance of learning to listen to others with an open mind as a first step toward establishing communication and trust. She told staff never to make assumptions and to always remain ready to learn and grow. Vera's presentation was followed by a lunch for staff provided by the Diversity Committee that included a wide array of ethnic entrees and side dishes.

Health Fair for Kids

On Saturday, May 17th, from 10-1 pm, Children's Family and Community Partnerships, in collaboration with The Black Child Development Institute-Milwaukee Affiliate, Aurora Family Service, and Aurora Health Care School-Based Health, held a "Health Fair for Kids" at Aurora Family Service at 3200 W. Highland. The fair had over 25 tables, including City of Milwaukee Lead Prevention, Milwaukee Public Schools Head Start, the Children's Hospital Safe Sleep initiative, and the Blood Center of Wisconsin. Aurora Family Service nurses administered free immunizations, and hearing and vision screenings. There were nearly 80 attendees and 37 immunizations were given. Plans are already underway for next year's fair.

From the Bench

Unification Court brings Family and Children's Court Cases Together

By Elizabeth Finn-Gorski, Children's Court Coordinator

In 2007, Chief Judge Kitty Brennan announced the First Judicial District Family and Children's Court Unification Project. This project is designed to make court proceedings more efficient and effective for families who have cases pending in both Children's Court and Family Court.

In May 2008, Judge Mary Triggiano's court was designated as the Unification Court for this project. Judges and commissioners in Children's and Family Court can make referrals to the Unification Court. Any party to a case, attorney, BMCW case manager, Court Appointed Special Advocate, or other persons involved with a family may suggest to the court that the case be transferred to the Unification Court.

Cases may be referred to the Unification Court if the case involves at least one case type in the Children's Court and one case type in the Family Court and meets the following criteria:

- No Children's Court cases shall be transferred to the Family Court without a signed order releasing exclusive jurisdiction;
- Cases where custody and placement in the Family Court case need to be modified when the Children's Court case dictates a change from the Family Court order;
- Cases where paternity adjudication can be achieved during the pendency of the Children's Court case;
- Cases that do not have a pending divorce case in Family Court; and
- Cases where exclusive jurisdiction can be released to Family Court and the Children's Court case can be dismissed.

Susan Medina is the project paralegal. Susan is located at the Children's Court Center in Room 2405, and is responsible for providing information to assist the courts in both divisions to make more informative decisions for families. She is also available to assist parents in the adjudication process. We are excited about this project and believe it will be most helpful to families.

Scholarship Fund Sees First College Graduates

Two former foster youth are the first to graduate with assistance from the DCF Scholarship Program.

Milwaukee residents Ganae Williams Bailey and Deanna Abbott both attended and graduated from UW-Parkside in Kenosha.

The young women were roommates at the university so were able to share their common experience.

Deanna received a degree in Communications and plans to go further with her education at Concordia University where she will do graduate work in Student/Personnel Leadership to become an academic advisor.

"The scholarship helped me a lot because it was already hard going in (to college). I didn't have to worry about financial aid and taking loans. I was able to go to school without working so I could concentrate on my studies," Deanna said. Deanna also participated in the Lad Lake Independent Living program that assisted her with other life skills.

Deanna is currently employed in the area of Human Resources with a temporary hiring service.

Ganae Williams Bailey also graduated from Parkside with a major in Humanities and a minor in Biology. She also wants to go on to graduate school to become an academic counselor and is getting experience working full time in the registration department at Milwaukee Area Technical College.

"I am looking for any opportunity to help people," Ganae said. "I would like to be a mentor to help children who are part of the system."



Deanna Abbott

Ganae worked while in school and said the scholarship money meant she could use what she earned on her living expenses without having to worry about how to pay tuition.



Ganae William Bailey

The DCF Scholarship Program provides scholarships for post secondary education and training programs for youth presently or formerly in out-of-home care. The scholarship program is administered by the Department of Children and Families and is funded by the Federal Education and Training Vouchers Program, a federally funded initiative under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act.

In addition to DCFS scholarships, the Hergert Foundation, funded through the estate of the late BMCW Deputy Director Dave Hergert, provides scholarships for youth ineligible for DCFS funds. In 2007, four youths received assistance through the Foundation.

2nd Placement Unit at CSSW to Focus on Long-term Placement

By Pamela Cotton, Licensing & Placement Manager

Children's Service Society of Wisconsin has created a second foster placement unit. The new unit, which will be supervised by placement veteran Teresa Cocker, will focus on non-emergency placement requests and consultations for children needing to be moved from short-term resources to appropriate families for long-term placement. This unit's goal is to improve placement stability by performing thorough assessments of children's needs and making placement setting recommendations.

This unit will be actively working to prevent placement disruptions by meeting with current providers and children in the field and teaming with Ongoing Case Management services partners to provide quality stabilization services to families.

In her new role as the clinical foster placement supervisor, Teresa Cocker will work to improve coordination between Placement and Initial Licensing staff to maximize the ability to transition children from assessment homes to licensed foster families, when no relative caregivers are available or appropriate. She will also supervise the newly created Relative Search Specialist position, whose primary function will be exploring relative placement options for newly detained children in assessment homes.